

July-August
2026
Vol. 61 No. 4



Newsletter of **LEPOCO**

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

Save the date...Thursday, July 16...

NO NUKES!

*From the Trinity Test to the Treaty on the
Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki*

4:00-5:00 pm

Vigil on North Side of Fahy Bridge

Bring a sign or borrow one of ours...

**5:00 pm: Slow walk to the Tondabayashi Garden
for a Program of Responsive Readings,
Reflections, Poetry, Action Postcard, & Songs by
the LEPOCO Peace Singers.**

Planned by the Stop the Wars Committee in
solidarity with many citizen groups working to end
nuclear weapons and stop nuclear power.



PEACE CAMP!

(Young People Making Peace Summer Day Camp)

July 27-31, 9 am - noon, daily.

**5 days of Peace-themed fun, games, songs,
stories, and friendship!**

CAMP IS NEARLY FULL!

*If you would like to see if there is space for
the child or children in your life, please call the
LEPOCO office at (610)691-8730.*



Gaza: The Ongoing Genocide

Since Israel and Hamas signed the misnamed ceasefire agreement in October 2025, the attention of the western media has largely shifted from the ongoing genocide in Gaza toward the more recent military conflicts in Iran and Lebanon. It is important, however, not to forget Gaza. After all, what is going on in southern Lebanon is the mirror of what happened earlier in Gaza — the obscenely disproportionate damage the Israeli military causes in the name of going after “terrorists,” the targeting of journalists and aid workers, the displacement of the entire population of cities and villages, and the systematic erasure of village after village as Israel establishes a new “security zone.” So far the war crimes in Lebanon — unlike Gaza — have not turned genocidal.

Even before the outbreak of the conflict between Hamas and Israel on October 7, 2023, Gaza was one of the most densely populated places on the planet, with about 2.3 million people packed into an area of only 141 square miles. Since the signing of the ceasefire, the Gaza ghetto has gotten much more crowded. Israel established a “yellow line” across Gaza, demarcated by concrete blocks painted yellow. Behind them a newly declared “security zone” is being established. Anyone near the yellow line is a target. And the yellow line keeps moving westward. The Israeli paper *Haaretz* reports that at night, IDF soldiers secretly move the concrete blocks. The security zone now takes up two-thirds of the Gaza strip. In this zone, Israel is ending any remnant of Palestinian life. New construction is under way as Israeli bulldozers carve out a landscape of military roads and fortifications. Close to the yellow line, berms have been built, creating firing positions on high ground. The Israeli finance minister Bezeal Smotrich has announced plans for a new belt of settlements inside the strip.

The creation of Israel’s security zone means that over two million Palestinians are now crammed into a narrow strip of land on Gaza’s coast. The massive bombardment of infrastructure during the conflict means there is no access to clean water or a sewage system. Few buildings are without major damage. The people are pressed into rodent-infested tent encampments. Israel regularly violates the ceasefire and permits only minimal amounts of food, medicine and other supplies to enter Hamas controlled territory. Evacuations for medical reasons are also extremely limited.

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Gaza: The Ongoing Genocide

(continued from page 1)

In June 2026, a U.N. report stressed another disturbing dimension of the genocide and the violence in the West Bank — the deliberate targeting of Palestinian children. The report of the U.N.'s Independent International Commission is entitled, "The Essence of Childhood Has Been Destroyed." The report details the many traumas and harms Israeli actions have inflicted on Palestinian youth — in education, nutrition, security, etc. None is more chilling, however, than the evidence, based especially on the place of bullet wounds in the bodies of dead children and teens, that Israeli soldiers and snipers have intentionally sought to kill children. Israel has rejected the commission's report as a "libelous sham." However, in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel has signed, it maintains that it does not have any legal responsibility for children in occupied Palestinian territory. The Max Planck Institute recently estimated that the total number of violent deaths in Gaza was between 100,000 and 126,000, of which 27% were children under 15 years old, and 24% women.

In November 2025, the U.N. Security Council, in one of the strangest decisions in its history, approved President Trump's creation of a Board of Peace to oversee his Peace Plan for Gaza. Trump is Chairman of the Board, to which states can purchase membership for one billion dollars. We have heard little since November about what the Board is doing — despite almost daily violations of the ceasefire. The Board's remit was to immediately lift the remaining curbs on the flow of aid into Gaza, create an international stabilization force that would replace the Israeli military occupation, and move toward reconstruction and a possible "pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood." Needless to say, none of this has come about. Recently the *Guardian* newspaper obtained a draft resolution in which the Board gives itself sweeping legal immunity for all that it does and grants itself the power to take over public property in Gaza "free of charge."

While we remain a long way off from a just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the recognition of Palestinian rights, there are reasons to be hopeful. A major sea change is occurring in public opinion. Recent polling indicates that six out of ten people now view Israel unfavorably — 80% of Democrats and left-leaning independents. Young people, especially, dislike Israel, e.g., even among Republicans, 57% of those younger than 50. Recent Democratic primary winners include many candidates who are determined to advance the cause of Palestinian rights and calling for an end to the U.S.'s arming of Israel. They deserve our support. LEPOCO members and friends who are concerned about Palestinian rights should contact their representatives and make their views known. Donations to UNRWA are also impor-

tant. This is the UN agency especially set up to help the Palestinians survive. In service to Israel, President Biden defunded the U.S. contribution. It is important we make up for the terrible error.

~ Mick Baylor

Support the Nazareth-to-Bethlehem Christmas Peace Pilgrimage: July 25th

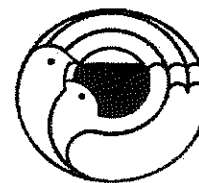
A fundraiser will be held on Saturday, July 25th, 7 to 10 pm, to benefit the annual Nazareth-to-Bethlehem Christmas Peace Pilgrimage. It will be held at the Lehigh Valley Friends Meeting, 4116 Bath Pike, Bethlehem (18017), and feature ice cream, Christmas cookies, a movie presentation, "Santa Claus Conquers the Martians," and the LEPOCO Peace Singers.

Potluck & Politics

Film: Earth's Greatest Enemy

"Earth's Greatest Enemy," is a documentary film that reveals a hidden truth behind the climate crisis: the role of the U.S. military as the world's largest institutional polluter. It draws on testimonies from scientists, veterans, and frontline communities and presents how military operations poison ecosystems.

A screening of this film will take place on Friday, August 14, at 6 pm, at the LEPOCO Peace Center, 53 E. Lehigh St. (lower level), Bethlehem (18018). Please bring food or beverage to share for the potluck dinner.



Newsletter of LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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The *LEPOCO Newsletter* is published six times a year by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern, a nonviolent, non-profit organization dedicated to peace in all forms.

Annual dues are:

Regular Member \$35

Limited Income Member \$10

Household Membership \$45

Supporting Member \$75

Articles/news should be submitted to one of the addresses above for consideration for the next issue of the newsletter.

Newsletter Staff: Tom Stinnett, Nancy Tate, Amanda Zaniesienko, Carol Baylor, Janet Ney, Rick Dow.

Thanks to all the people who collate and prepare the newsletter for mailing each month.

LEPOCO Steering Committee: Martha Christine, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Inge Karlberg-Stannik, Monica McAgdon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

The Struggle Shared

"A world without caste would set everyone free."

- from the book Caste, by Isabel Wilkerson

"HER WORK MADE HER ONE OF LEBANON'S MOST RESPECTED VOICES for marine conservation and biodiversity protection." The Lebanese wildlife conservation group Green Southerners eulogized Mona Khalil, a woman who dedicated her life to the protection of sea turtles, who was killed as the result of an Israeli airstrike on her home in Mansouri, southern Lebanon. Her conservation site, Orange House, was brightly colored and well-known as a command center for protecting life; it was not a military target.

AMERICA'S NATIONAL MAMMAL, bison, may be forced off protected federal grasslands in Montana in a move by the federal Bureau of Land Management. The Trump administration wants to take away the grazing rights that have allowed a nonprofit, American Prairie, to build a herd of 900 bison. The suggested decision would allow cattle-only on land that has been available to both bison and cattle. Native American Tribal efforts to restore buffalo may be severely hampered by the action. For more information and to sign a petition against the change, go to GreaterGood.com.

"QUAKERTOWN 5" STUDENTS WHO WERE ARRESTED when they engaged in a protest on downtown streets have had their cases resolved through consent decrees. A fifth student and her family, represented by recent LEPOCO speaker, Ettore Angelo, contended that the teen did nothing wrong. They worked to get the charges dropped and would not settle. The outcome is that the charges have been dismissed; the student is required to do 20 hours of community service and write an essay. Meanwhile the Bucks County District Attorney is continuing an investigation into police conduct; to

date, no disciplinary action has been taken against the police officers involved in the incident.

BUILDING A BORDER WALL IN A NATIONAL PARK requires the waiver of at least 10 environmental laws that should protect the land from the intrusion of roads and barriers. Despite public outcry since the proposal was revealed earlier this year, Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin is pushing ahead with construction of steel vehicle barriers and patrol roads in Big Bend National Park in Texas. Maps showing the placement of the wall indicate that wilderness areas, some of the wildest in the country, will be damaged. At the same time, the Rio Grande will be locked behind hideous barriers. Construction is expected to be completed by May 2027.

ENDING THE DEATH PENALTY IN PENNSYLVANIA came closer to reality in April when two bills were reported as committed by the Judiciary Committee on votes of 14 yea, 12 nay. HB 99, repealing the death penalty, was introduced by Christopher Rabb (D-District 200) and HB 888, abolishing the death penalty, was introduced by Russ Diamond (R-District 102). If the legislation passes, Pennsylvania would be the 24th state to abolish executions. In February 2023, Governor Josh Shapiro called for an end to the death penalty. There have been no executions in Pennsylvania since 1999.

LEHIGH VALLEY CITIZENS RESPOND TO NEEDS. The Emergency Response Network (ERN) is a response to the crises created by the aggressive anti-immigrant tactics of I.C.E. The group offers rapid response, legal and other direct aid, and policy/mobilization. LEPOCO been collecting non-perishable items

like paper towels, toilet tissue, and sanitary napkins for ERN to distribute to anyone who is afraid to leave home because of I.C.E. threats. An ERN Emergency Hotline: 610-850-9930, is available from 6 am - 6 pm, Monday - Friday.

HUMANITARIAN AND HEALTH-CARE NEEDS IN GAZA have been highlighted locally by the Lehigh Valley Palestine Coalition. Several organizations, among them, the Jewish Voice for Peace in the Lehigh Valley, Lehigh Valley Democratic Socialists of the Lehigh Valley, the Student Palestine Action Committee of Lehigh University, Lehigh Valley Food Not Bombs, LEPOCO, and other groups have organized events in support of Palestinian liberation.

You can contact your members of Congress and urge them to press for U.S. aid being restored to the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine. You can also make a personal donation at UNRWA USA National Committee, P.O. Box 18697, Washington, DC 20036.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES PROTESTING DATA CENTERS have prompted numerous articles in the local press. The citizens' concerns are real. Danny Caine, the host of Building Local Power, the official podcast of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, visited areas where data centers dot the landscape. The noise alone adversely affects the ability of residents to sleep and to enjoy the outdoors. With electric bills skyrocketing and other effects of the centers on water and sewage, there is widespread opposition to their construction. Caine writes, "These coalitions are so strong in part because people of all stripes, across the political spectrum, resent the idea of tech corporations feeling entitled to their local resources."

- Janet Ney



Juanita Gómez Reyes (1939-2025) Presente

Juanita was a long-time friend of several members of LEPOCO. She was a dear friend of mine as well, since 1996, when she was a student in Critical Reading, a class I taught at Northampton Community College. Juanita attended LEPOCO vigils and annual gatherings, and supported LEPOCO over the years.

Born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, she moved to New York City with family members and worked as a seamstress in the garment district, living out stories of life's changes that I never tired of hearing. In addition to helping her family as the eldest of many siblings, she mothered four children of her own. Eventually, she became a bilingual receptionist for a dentist and trained for a Dental Hygiene License at City College. Juanita worked as a dental hygienist in NYC and the Lehigh Valley after moving to Palmer, Pennsylvania in 1974.

Growing dissatisfied with being a dental hygienist, Juanita attended classes at NCC, transferred to Cedar Crest College, where she became friends with Marcie Lightwood and Nancy Johnston of LEPOCO and earned a degree in Psychology. Thereafter, Juanita worked for the Allentown School District as a bilingual absenteeism specialist until she retired in her mid-seventies.

After several months of declining health, Juanita passed on December 14, 2025. I joined LEPOCO Peace Singers, Nancy Tate, Marcie Lightwood, Rick Weaver, and Nancy Johnston, in singing a few songs at a graveside ceremony marking the burial of her cremains in the Easton Historic Cemetery on May 27. Afterwards, friends and family gathered at the home of Jeanette, Juanita's daughter, and her husband Willie Pratt. Loved by many, Juanita will remain an inspiration to all who knew her.

- Monica McAgnon

A N.J. Art Museum's Peace Flag Project

The Red Mill Museum Village and Hunterdon Art Museum in Clinton, NJ, in collaboration with Handwork: Celebrating American Crafts 2026, invited community groups and individuals to create all-natural fiber flags on the meaning of peace. Authorities were amazed by the unanticipated 1,231 peace flags created by local scouts, school children, senior centers, professional artists, civic groups, textile guilds, crafting organizations and hundreds of individuals.

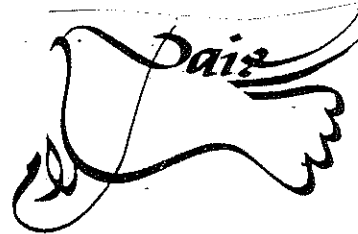
Reminiscent of Tibetan prayer flags, the Peace Project Flags are strung along the banks and pedestrian bridge over the Lower Branch of the Raritan River. The peace flags symbolically link the two museums in peace and will remain in place until August 30.

Janice Kovach, Mayor of Clinton delivered a Proclamation of Peace at the June 14 Opening, and The Hunterdon Chorale Alliance sang several songs. A Presbyterian minister also spoke.

LEPOCO member Atty. Martricia McLaughlin told us about the project, and so I made a linen and cotton thread peace flag in honor of my Polish grandparents. They had farmed down Quarry Road beyond the Red Mill in Clinton, on land that had also been vital to indigenous peoples. All the land is now under Spruce Run Reservoir, created by the State of New Jersey as a remedy for droughts. Spruce Run Reservoir also serves as a source of water for Northern New Jersey and locally as a recreation area for boating, fishing, hunting, camping, swimming, and walking.

The "Peace Flag Project" is part of a yearlong celebration of traditional and contemporary craft practices in recognition of the state and nation's 250th anniversaries. For more information, visit: theredmill.org or hunterdonartmuseum.org.

- Monica McAgnon



The Growing Wealth Divide

On Friday evening, June 12th, a group of about 20 people gathered in LEPOCO's office space, to share good food, cool beverages, and to listen to Ettore Angelo and Mark Pinsley speak on wealth inequality and a potential solution to help lessen the gap.

Ettore (Ed) Angelo, a lawyer located in Quakertown, shared information about what "wealth inequality" is and how it is damaging for people, especially for children in our current systems. Through a brief talk, a short video, and a handout (which is available in the LEPOCO office), he was able to help us envision the vast span of inequality between the poorest and the richest of U.S. residents.

Mark Pinsley, elected Lehigh County Controller, was a natural follow-up for Ed, as he spoke on his hope for a 0.4% intangible personal property tax ("Wealth Tax") in Lehigh County, which could take some burden off the shoulders of middle- and lower-income taxpayers, and it could help decrease the steadily deepening deficit that Lehigh County has been dealing with over the years.

These are the conversations that seem to be happening everywhere, as people like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are expressing a need for imposing this kind of tax on the wealthiest U.S. citizens to deal with the current "affordability crisis," and Zohran Mamdani has proposed a similar tax plan for NYC. Call the LEPOCO office at 610-691-8730, to get a copy of Ed's handout and keep the conversation going!

- Amanda Zaniesienko

Bits & Pieces

Two LEPOCO letter-writing sessions have been held this spring – the last one being June 15. Inge Karlberg-Stannik originated the idea for this effort and led the sessions at the Peace Center. At least a dozen people participated and a good collection of letters was written to various elected officials and government entities. The group will begin meeting again in September. Dates and times will be announced.

Inequality.org of the Institute for Policy Studies reported on July 1st, that the estimated cost for Trump's proposed triumphal arch is \$100 million. The National Priorities Project of the Institute says that sum could pay for 11,422 public housing units for a year.

The world's richest man, Elon Musk, has threatened to sue Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) for defamation. Rep. Khanna had said the trillionaire's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) had "possibly sentenced" 4.5 million children "to death" through its dismantling of the United States Agency of International Development (USAID) in 2025. In response, Rep. Khanna renewed his call for Elon Musk to testify before Congress to defend his dramatic cuts to foreign aid.

Khanna's assertion was based on the findings of the July 2025 Lancet study which found that DOGE's cancelation of roughly 83% of the programs run by USAID – including 88% cuts to child health aid, 87% cuts to epidemic and disease surveillance, and 94% cuts to family planning assistance – could result in the deaths of 14 million people by 2030, including 4.5 million children under five.



The death toll from the June 24, twin earthquakes that struck Venezuela reached over 3,000. Nearly 50,000 are reported missing and thousands more are homeless.

The U.S. has levied sanctions on Venezuela for more than 20 years. In January we bombed Caracas and kidnapped the country's president and first lady. The U.S. then appropriated Venezuela's resources, while maintaining billions in Venezuelan state funds and assets frozen in U.S. banks.

Following the earthquakes we have promised \$150 million in aid as well as search and rescue assistance. The U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control has lifted sanctions on the transactions related to earthquake relief efforts in Venezuela. However, the remaining sanctions were maintained as well as the block on the billions of Venezuela's own funds. Obviously, these assets are very much needed for earthquake relief.

We are urged to contact our elected representatives and urge a humanitarian surge of aid to Venezuela and an end to sanctions.

(Source: Massachusetts Peace Action)

Moments before his arrest by U.S. Capitol Police, active-duty Air Force Major Jason Watson delivered an address to a group of reporters and activists convened in front of Congress, becoming the nation's first active-duty service member to call for the immediate impeachment and removal of Commander-in-Chief President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance. Major Watson urged members of Congress to stand with Rep. Al Green (D-Texas) by backing articles of impeachment in the House of Representatives.

(Source: Peace & Planet News)

The Trump administration is reportedly planning to deport more than 500 unaccompanied immigrant children, bypassing long-standing legal protections for migrant children who are in the U.S. without their parents. The children have been in custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement

for at least six months and don't have family relatives or guardians who could sponsor them in the country. ORR, which is overseen by Health and Human Services, has aided the Trump administration in identifying children who could become targets for deportation.

Democratic Senator Ron Wyden condemned the move in a letter to HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., writing, "This is severe institutional failure that places hundreds of vulnerable children in immediate jeopardy, effectively erasing them from the protection of U.S. oversight and thrusting them back into danger."

(Source: "Democracy Now!" 6/26/26)

Our country is full of heroic people who are not Presidents or military leaders or Wall Street wizards, but who are doing something to keep alive the spirit of resistance to injustice and war. To ward off alienation and gloom, it is only necessary to remember the unremembered heroes of the past and look around us for the unnoticed heroes of the present.

- Howard Zinn, as quoted by Dave Zirin in the July-August 2026, issue of "The Nation."

Support LEPOCO!

☐ Enclosed is a donation of \$_____.

☐ I am especially interested in the following issues:

Name

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Address

City

State Zip

Send to LEPOCO Peace Center, 53 East Lehigh St. (Lower Level), Bethlehem, PA 18018
Or donate through PayPal at www.lepoco.org.



LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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Weekly Peace Vigils (Thursdays)

July 23, 30 & August 6, 13, 20, 27

4:00 – 5:00 pm

3rd & Wyandotte Sts., (south) Bethlehem

Stop Trump's war on Iran, Venezuela, Cuba...

End Israel's attacks on Gaza, Iran, Lebanon...

End all the wars. Witness for peace.

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, for more information.

Potluck & Politics

Film:

"Earth's Greatest Enemy"

Revealing a truth behind
the climate crisis

Friday, August 14

6 pm

LEPOCO Peace Center
Bethlehem

(See page 2 for more info.)

Hiroshima-Nagasaki Observance

Thursday, July 16

4:00 & 5:30 pm

81st Anniversary of Trinity test

Bethlehem

(See page 1 for more details)

Peace Pilgrimage Fundraiser

Christmas in July

Sat., July 25, 7-10 pm

L.V. Friends Meeting

4116 Bath Pike

(Rt. 512 ½ mile north of Rt. 22)

(see page 2 for more info.)